

# Depression and Diabetes

## Symptoms of Depression

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability

If five or more of these symptoms are present every day for at least two weeks and interfere with routine daily activities such as work, self-care, and childcare or social life, seek an evaluation for depression.

Depression can affect anyone, but people with diabetes, a serious disease that affects about 21 million Americans, may be at greater risk. Also, people with depression may be at greater risk for developing diabetes. Treatment for depression helps people manage symptoms of both diseases, thus improving the quality of their lives.

Studies suggest that diabetes doubles the risk of depression compared to those without diabetes. The chances of becoming depressed increase as diabetes complications worsen. Research shows that depression leads to poorer physical and mental functioning, so a person is less likely to follow a diet or medication plan. Diabetes can also affect important aspects such as the social and sex life. Treating depression with therapy, medication, or a mixture of these treatments can improve a person's well-being and ability to manage diabetes.

Causes of and the link between depression and diabetes are unclear. Depression may happen because of stress but also may result from the effect of diabetes on the brain. Studies suggest that people with diabetes who have a history of depression are more likely to develop diabetic complications than those without depression. Despite progress in the past 20 years, depression often is not diagnosed or treated. People with diabetes, their families and friends, and even their doctors may not see the symptoms of depression.

## Depression Facts

Depression is a serious medical condition that affects thoughts, feelings, and the ability to function in everyday life. Depression can occur at any age. Studies sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health estimate almost 10 percent of American adults go through some form of depression every year. Although

current treatments ease symptoms in over 80 percent of those treated, less than half of people with depression get the help they need.

Depression results from abnormal working of the brain. The causes of depression are a matter of intense research. An interaction between family history and life history appear to shape a person's level of risk. Depression may be caused by stress, trying life events, side effects of medications, or other factors. Whatever its cause, depression can limit the energy needed to keep focused on treatment for other disorders, such as diabetes.

### **Get Treatment for Depression**

While there are many treatments for depression, they must be carefully chosen by the person and trained professionals based on the circumstances of the person and family. Antidepressant medications are generally well-tolerated and safe for people with diabetes. Specific types of psychotherapy, or "talk" therapy, also can relieve depression. However, recovery from depression takes time. Antidepressant medications can take a number of weeks to work and may need to be combined with ongoing therapy. Not everyone responds to treatment in the same way. Medications and dosing may need to be adjusted.

In people who have diabetes and depression, scientists report that talk therapy and antidepressant medications have good effects on both mood and blood sugar control.

Treatment for depression for a person with diabetes should be managed by a mental health professional—for example, a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker—who is in close communication with the medical doctor. This is even more important when antidepressant medication is prescribed, so that possible harmful drug interactions can be prevented. People with

diabetes who develop depression, as well as people in treatment for depression who then develop diabetes, should make sure to tell any doctor they visit about all of the medications they are taking.

Use of herbal supplements of any kind should be discussed with a doctor before they are tried. Recently, scientists have discovered that St. John's wort, an herbal remedy sold over-the-counter and promoted as a treatment for mild depression, can have harmful interactions with some other medications.

Remember, depression is a treatable disorder of the brain. Depression can be treated in addition to whatever other illnesses a person might have, including diabetes. If you think you may be depressed or know someone who is, don't lose hope. Seek help.

### **For more information, contact:**

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease (NIDDK).  
Office of Communications and Public Liaison  
31 Center Drive, Room 9A04,  
MSC 2560 Bethesda, MD 20892-2560.  
Phone 301-496-3583. E-mail:  
[NIDDK\\_Inquiries@nih.gov](mailto:NIDDK_Inquiries@nih.gov). Web site:  
<http://www.niddk.nih.gov>.

South Dakota Diabetes Prevention & Control Program.  
615 E Fourth Street  
Pierre, SD 57501 Phone 1-800-738-2301  
Web site: <http://diabetes.sd.gov>.

250 copies were printed by the SD  
Department of Health for \$0.10 each

Adapted from NIH Publication No. 02-5003

Department of Health and Human  
Services

Public Health Service

National Institutes of Health

National Institute of Mental Health

May 2002